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AUTHOR Winget, W. Gary
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ABSTRACT

This position paper proposes that the State of Minnesota initiate a voluntary registration program for day care providers who care for the children of one family in the parents' or provider's home. A brief discussion of the utilization of child care services on a national and state level focuses especially on parental preference for informal child care arrangements in Minnesota. Three registration models which have been proposed for home-bound child care providers in Minnesota are described: voluntary registration, which would apply to day care providers who give supplemental child care services for one or more children from one family in the children's home and are not now required to be licensed; mandatory registration, which would apply to operators of family day care homes now required to be licensed; and comprehensive registration which adds the voluntary program to the system and replaces mandatory licensing of family day care homes by mandatory registration. An argument in favor of adopting the voluntary registration model in Minnesota is presented, and it is recommended that any registration model be tied to support, referral, information and education services for registered providers and the parents who use them. Advocates of the voluntary registration model claim that this system could extend the benefits of the formal child care system yet retain many of the characteristics of the informal system. Information about registration programs in other states is also included. (CM)

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Presentation on

Registering of Home-Based Child Care Providers

at the First Biennial Minnesota State Licensing Workshop

by W. Gary Winget, Executive Director
Child Care Council of Ramsey County, Inc.

The position which will be presented at this workshop is that the State of Minnesota should initiate a voluntary registration program for day care providers who care for the children of one family in the parents' or provider's home. In this form, registration may be viewed as an extension of the formal child care system rather than an alternative to the current licensing system.

I. Background.

The latest national statistics indicate that there are 15% more children under six years of age with mothers in the labor force than there were in 1970--6.4 million, up from 5.6 million in 1970.[1]

These children are cared for in a variety of arrangements. A recent national study found the following patterns of utili-

[1]U.S. Department of Labor, "Annual Survey of Marital and Family Characteristics, March, 1976," News Release, February 25, 1977.

zation: child care centers of various types, 19%; in-provider's-home by non-relatives (including FDC), 22%; in-parents'-home by non-relatives, 15%; relatives, 31%; cooperatives, 1%; and family members, 12%.[2]

While different studies find different patterns of utilization, all studies agree that the dominate child care arrangements are not licensed arrangements (i.e., most children who need care because their parents work are cared for in unlicensed or informal arrangements). Furthermore, parents are overwhelmingly satisfied with these arrangements (e.g., 93% were happy with the person or place taking care of their child).[3]

With regard to in-parents'-home care by a non-relative, about 40% of the employed parents would choose this type of care first. The most significant problems expressed with this type of care were frequent changing of caregivers, concern over theft (especially among lower-income families), and cost. It's interesting to note that only about one-fifth of these parents felt that the caregiver should help around the house.[4]

About half of all employed parents would select a relative as their first choice.[5] Cost is one of the major factors influencing this decision, although the availability of relatives to care for children is a problem which limits the use of relatives as caregivers.

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[2]Office of Child Development, National Child Care Consumer Study: 1975, Volume II, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Health and Welfare, 1976), pp. 10-2.

[3]OCD, Volume III, pp. 3-12.

[4]OCD, Volume III, pp. 3-14, 15, 16.

[5]OCD, Volume III, pp. 3-17.

In-provider's-home care by a non-relative is the first choice of very few parents and is among the least preferred types of care available.[6] This feeling among parents runs counter to recent local, State, and Federal policies promoting licensed family day care, and, whatever the potential for acceptance, points to the problems which must be overcome by family day care advocates.

The facts are clear, whether taken from the research literature or our own experiences: informal child care services are the most preferred and most used forms of care.

In 1974, the Greater Saint Paul Council for Coordinated Child Care (4-C) recognized that the preference for and utilization of informal child care services was a reality which could not be ignored and recommended that child care policies be adjusted to assure all children, in both formal and informal settings, the support they needed to grow and develop to their full potential.[7] The 4-C recommended that two major service strategies be implemented with one intended to supply "formal child care services" (i.e., centers, family day care homes, and supervised in-home child care aides) and the second intended to supply "supportive child development services" for children and caregivers in both formal and informal settings (i.e., health, psychological, special education, counseling, education services). What the 4-C envisioned was the addition

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[6]OCD, Volume III, pp. 3-20.

[7]Greater Saint Paul Council for Coordinated Child Care, Child Care: '76 and Beyond (St. Paul: 1976), p. ii.

of the supervised in-home caregiver to the formal child care service system and the development of resource centers, toy-lending libraries, training programs, screening, special education, and other supportive child development services which would outreach and support caregivers whether or not they were licensed. Two specific program models emerged from the 4-C's processes: first, a voluntary registration program for home-based caregivers who were not required to be licensed as family day care homes, and second, a network of community-based early childhood resource centers tied into an area-wide system of supportive services.

During the past three years, two important developments have occurred which are consistent with the strategies proposed by the 4-C. First, the Minnesota Legislature enacted legislation in 1975 initiating the Early Childhood and Family Education Program. This program is available to all children and parents and has the potential for fulfilling the supportive child development service strategy because it has the capacity to outreach and provide supportive services to caregivers and children in both formal and informal settings. Second, the Citizens League released a report in 1976 which recognized the importance of informal child care providers and recommended that legislation be enacted which would include such providers, on a voluntary basis, in a pilot registration program as well as in the provision of supportive services.[8]

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[8]Citizens League, Broading the Options in Child Care (Minneapolis: 1976), p. 62.

Just as the facts are clear regarding the preference for and utilization of informal child care arrangements, we can clearly see the development of trends which will eventually lead to the incorporation of a voluntary registration program and a network of community-based early childhood resource centers as a part of the total child care service system in Minnesota.

II. Models for the Registration of Home-Bound Child Care Providers.

The voluntary registration program is, however, not the only registration proposal being promoted in the State. For purposes of discussion, one can categorize the registration models which have been proposed for Minnesota as follows: first, voluntary registration; second, mandatory registration; and third, comprehensive registration.

The term registration means a process whereby the State maintains a record of all registered providers, and requires such providers to certify that they have complied with all the rules and regulations prescribed by the State. The process of registering differs from the process of licensing primarily in that there is no pre-registration study or regular follow-up compliance site visit by the regulatory agency; rather, the primary responsibility for quality control is shifted to the parent with the regulatory agency responsible for following up on complaints and making random spot checks for compliance.

The first registration model, voluntary registration, would apply to "day care providers" who are not required to be licensed and who provide supplemental child day care services. "Day care provider" is defined as a person who regularly provides supplemental child day care services for one or more children from one family in the children's home or in a place other than the children's home. Voluntary means that there is no legal obligation placed upon the provider to register. The voluntary registration model is an addition to the current formal child care system and typically includes the caregiver who goes into the parents' home and the caregiver who cares for the children of one family in the caregiver's home. In the voluntary process, the provider would be registered, not the facility.

Mandatory registration, the second model, would apply to operators of family day care homes which are now required to be licensed under Minnesota Statutes 245.783. The mandatory model would replace the licensing of family day care homes by requiring such homes to be registered.

The final model, comprehensive registration, incorporates both the voluntary and mandatory models--it adds the voluntary program to the system and replaces mandatory licensing by mandatory registration of family day care homes.

In addition to these three registration models, advocates of registration strongly recommend that any registration program be tied to support, referral, information, and education services for the registered providers and parents who use them.

In particular, written information regarding the nature of standards which providers have agreed to meet and the method for parent enforcement of these standards would have to be provided to parents because the registration program places primary responsibility upon them for enforcement of the standards.

III. A Proposed Model for Minnesota: Voluntary Registration.

Minnesota needs to extend its formal child care service system and provide more providers and parents the opportunity to become part of the formal system. A voluntary registration program, which incorporates provisions for informing parents about the nature of and methods for enforcing the prescribed standards, is the extension to the system which will most benefit children, parents, and caregivers. At this point in time, nobody is prepared to present a final document which specifically and in detail describes the complete program. The policy decisions can, however, be made based upon the information available. Once the policy decisions are made, we can all join in the tasks of developing registration standards, administrative procedures and accountability, enforcement procedures, and coordination with other regulatory requirements.

Because we are concerned about the growth and development of all children in child care settings, we must not only improve but go beyond the licensed child care center and licensed family day care home. The initiation of a voluntary registration

program is not the only action needed in Minnesota, but it is one of the priority actions which should be implemented during the next session of the Legislature.

Just as it took child care centers and family day care homes decades to reach their current state of development, participation in and utilization of a voluntary registration program will develop slowly. There are, however, a significant number of parents in the market for registered child care providers. Requests for these providers have come to the Child Care Council of Ramsey County both through the referral services and the parent members of the Council, and recent studies indicate that parents want and need a more adequate, accessible, and dependable supply of qualified in-home child care providers.

A voluntary registration program will benefit parents, providers, children, and society by opening up some of the benefits of the formal child care system while maintaining many of the characteristics of the informal system. For example:

Parents. Some parents feel that a family day care home does not offer enough personal attention and, therefore, want a qualified person to take care of just their children. Finding a provider for a single family is very difficult but could be made easier by including such providers in the referral system. Parents want to make sure that the person caring for their child is physically and emotionally fit; such parents would benefit from the health examination, reference checks, and other registration processes. Many parents would welcome a registration process which would assure them that the person

caring for their child has had some recent exposure to child development training and access, hopefully, to resource centers and other supportive services. A significant number of parents are concerned about theft and would feel more comfortable if caregivers in their homes were bonded and subjected to the continuing oversight of the registration process.

Providers. For the first time, in-home day care providers or babysitters would have the opportunity to obtain public recognition and credentials for their services. One-family day care providers could become part of the formal system without having to go through the full licensing process. Providers as well as agencies that used registered child care providers could benefit from being included in the referral system. Providers could participate in training programs, receive newsletters, use resource centers, and be incorporated into group insurance and bonding programs.

The voluntary registration program is not intended for all parents who use and all caregivers who provide informal child care. It is, however, offering more parents and more caregivers access to some of the benefits of the formal child care system and assuring society that more children will be cared for in settings which are conducive to their optimal growth and development.

IV. Registration Experiences in Other States.

Several states are experimenting with registration programs

similar to the mandatory registration model. The State of Michigan has one of the most interesting controlled experiments and has included a very informative evaluation component. North Dakota has enacted a state-wide registration system for family day care homes. Other states are also involved in registration programs, such as Massachusetts, North Carolina, Texas, and Iowa.

It does not appear, based upon information to date, that any state has initiated a voluntary registration program. It should be noted, however, that all states utilizing Federal Social Service funds for in-home child care are required to develop standards for and certify caregivers being paid with such funds, and that North Dakota has incorporated this form of registration into its registration law.

Based upon the experiences in Michigan, it appears that mandatory registration programs which are properly designed and administered can be less expensive to administer, more effective in increasing the number of services regulated, easier on the provider, and as effective in minimizing rule violations.

V. Summary.

While there are advocates for a mandatory registration program in Minnesota, it does not appear that there is any compelling reason why Minnesota should make the switch now. The current licensing rule and procedures are reasonably effective in promoting family day care.

The priority area for development is the more informal day care provider (i.e., the person who cares for the children of one family in either the parents' or provider's home). Through a voluntary registration program, the State of Minnesota can offer more parents and children the type of care and experiences they need and want.